

Opening Statement of Chairman Blake Farenthold
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, U.S. Postal Service and the Census
“Sequestration Oversight: Understanding the Administration’s Decisions on Spending
Cuts and Furloughs”
March 19, 2013

Today, we’re going to talk about stewardship of taxpayer funds. This hearing is about being responsible managers. And it is about the credibility of this Administration. Agencies should have planned better for the sequester. And if the President, government agencies, and the secretaries who head those agencies would spend more time planning and less time misleading the American people with scare tactics about the sequester, we’d all be better off.

We’ve known about the sequester since August 2011. My grandmother taught me a lot of things, but one that I use almost every day is “plan for the worst and hope for the best”. Why didn’t our government agencies apply this bit of common sense in dealing with the sequester? They could have done simple things, like rein in bonuses, cut wasteful and frivolous spending and – as we are learning in the course of our hearing – implement the reports of their own IGs to save money.

But what have these agencies done, instead? They listened to the irresponsible advice of the President – to do nothing – rather than plan for the worst. Last summer, The President’s OMB instructed agencies to **“continue normal spending** and operations since more than 5 months remained” before sequestration. This was reckless. Sequester was the Law of the Land, so why didn’t agencies at least come up with a contingency plan?

Even our federal employee unions recognize that the agencies did not take the sequester seriously. A regional president of the American Federation of Government Employees recently commented, “agencies really haven’t done their homework. They were under the illusion that the sequester wasn’t really going to happen.”

With the sequester now upon us, some of the Administration’s spending choices make no sense.

The only conclusion I can draw is the President wants to politicize the sequester and make the cuts as painful as possible. Rather than looking for waste, fraud and abuse, we have furloughs. Rather than keeping the White House open for tours, we have Presidential golf outings. And, quite frankly, I am appalled that the President has thrown the men and women who would take a bullet for him – the Secret Service – under the bus for cancelling White House tours. Really, Mr. President? I don’t believe that for a second. If you’d have said, “Let’s find somewhere else to cut”, they’d have found plenty of options. How about looking at the \$300K annual pay for calligraphers? All Macs come with Zapf Chancery, a nice calligraphic font. The President and his executive branch agencies are talking furloughs when, on the day the sequester went into effect, these agencies posted more than 400 jobs online.

I'm worried about the credibility of this Administration. We need to trust our President – but that trust is eroding due to his false rhetoric about the sequester. When President Obama said that the janitors and security guards who work at the Capitol will face pay cuts, the superintendent of the Capitol had to send out an email to employees saying their pay and benefits will not be impacted. And when the Secretary of Education, Mr. Duncan, said teachers were getting pink slips, the *Washington Post* awarded him “Four Pinocchio’s” for that claim.

The public is starting to catch on. *Politico* recently ran an article asking, “Did President Obama cry wolf about the sequester?” And the *Chicago Tribune* ran an editorial headlined, “Truth-squadding sequester hysteria: Officials sabotage themselves when they manipulate, exaggerate and flout common sense.” Again, if agencies would get to work and plan instead of using scare tactics, we all would be better off.

Finally, let me express my disappointment with the amount of effort it took to have the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture testify today – I understand we gave them flexibility on witnesses, but they were both unable to attend the hearing we scheduled last week. I am glad that they finally agreed to be here today. I would also like to take a moment to commend the FCC. From the beginning, despite their own scheduling challenges, they were responsive to the Committee and have been extremely cooperative.

I thank them for that. With that, I look forward to a productive discussion about how these agencies plan to manage the sequester.